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ABSTRACT

A program description of a social studies curriculum development project supported by an ESEA Title III Grant is presented in this paper. The course, designed for secondary students who will soon be voting, focuses on the importance of active involvement and citizenship responsibility for participation in the democratic process. The major objective is to teach practical politics in a way that is not only interesting but motivates students. Simulations emphasizing role playing, case studies, small group activities, and independent learning projects are some of the flexible teaching techniques employed. The course is divided into six sections: 1) an introduction to politics stressing power relationships and influence, and political behavior; 2) the citizen's role in government; 3) the structure and function of American political institutions; 4) elections, voting, and campaigning, 5) characteristics of influencing political attitudes and behavior; and 6) analyzing and evaluating the political decision making process. In addition, brief information is included on inservice workshops, dissemination activities of the project, funding, and staffing. A related document is SO 004 984. (SJM)

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PROJECT 18: EFFECTIVELY INFLUENCING POLITICAL DECISIONS

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By enfranchising approximately 11.5 million voters, the Twenty-sixth Amendment poses a challenge to educators to deal in a practical way with voter education. The immediacy of student involvement requires that we respond with a program that will make student entry into the political system both exciting and meaningful. Project 18 is such a program. It offers a clear alternative to the traditional civics course, for its focus is on practical politics at the local and state levels. No attempt is made to teach morality, the "oughts" of the democratic system. No attempt is made to teach the structure of government without teaching the use to which a knowledge of structure can be put. The theme behind the course is involvement. The only value the course attempts to teach is the importance of an active, concerned citizenry for the democratic process.

Background

Project 18 had its beginning about two years ago when the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania decided to lobby for the development of a practical course in politics which could be offered to the Commonwealth's students. The combined efforts of the League, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs, and the

Lower Merion School District will come to fruition as the course, "Project 18: Effectively Influencing Political Decisions," is piloted in fifteen schools across the state in the fall 1972 semester.[1]

The consortium idea was formalized with the creation of the Project 18 Advisory Board which represents, in addition to the sponsoring agencies, students, faculty, and parents. The Advisory Board has been active throughout the project, and its influence permeates the entire course.

Additional advice on practical political knowledge and know-how was solicited from practicing politicians and "movers and shakers" at the local and state government levels. Several members of the community provided us with not only knowledge, advice, and support, but logistical aid as well and the benefit of far-ranging contacts among political leaders. This is the type of community involvement that has made this project a good deal stronger than it would otherwise have been.

Course Objectives

The objectives established for Project 18 might best be illustrated by the following questions for which the course seeks to provide answers:

(1) Do the students feel that they have the power to influence political decisions?

(2) Can the students demonstrate a practical knowledge of the structure and function of local, county, and state governmental units (e.g., can they apply such knowledge in solving practical political problems)?

(3) Do the students have a knowledge of practical political skills which could be used in attempting to influence political decision-makers?

(4) Given a political issue, are the students able to devise strategies for practical political action?

(5) Do the students have a knowledge of democratic political processes and the role of the citizen therein (e.g., how political decisions are made, the role of political parties, election and voting processes, etc.)?

(6) Are the students able to explain the relationship between social factors (e.g., culture, socialization processes, socio-economic status, sex, race, ethnicity, etc.) and political attitudes and behavior?

Course Overview

To provide the students with opportunities to learn information and skills which would allow them to answer the above questions, the course is divided into the six sections described below.

I. Politics: Who Gets What and How

This first section is designed to introduce the students to politics. Rather than have them read about such things as the purpose of government (frequently the first chapter in civics texts), the students will participate in the simulation "Section" which requires them to take on roles of political actors in the real world.[2] The purpose of this activity is to

provide a common political-like experience which contains a relatively high degree of realism and from which the students can formulate their own ideas of what constitutes political activity. The important characteristics of political activity upon which the students will concentrate during the debriefing session are power relationships, methods of exerting influence, and political behavior. The students must then apply these ideas to a new situation; given a case study which they have not previously read, they must identify the source of conflict, the power relationships that exist, and the methods of bargaining used.

A video taped "news special" has been produced to accompany the simulation. This "white paper" style report will focus student attention on the overall problems faced by the state of Midland and the particular needs of each of its five sections as these are perceived by key citizens from each area. The tape includes graphics and slides which illustrate conditions being described by the actors.

II. The Citizen's Role in Government: Exercises in Practical Political Action.

Having now gotten a taste of politics, the students are required in Section II to come to grips with a political issue which is real and important to them. The major course project begins with this series of lessons. The students are asked to develop a strategy for influencing decisions that bear on a political issue which is of interest to them.

The strategy, which is due at the end of Section V, may very well be a cooperative effort; it is to include a problem statement, explanations of several tactics which the students would employ and their anticipated consequences, and a description of at least one tactic that was considered but rejected and a brief explanation of why it was discarded.

Rather than providing the students with a list of political problems and requiring them to choose one as a target for their strategies, the students identify political issues which they in fact perceive as real political issues. This is done through a "problem census" activity as described by Epstein.[3] The issue a student selects will provide a framework for organizing much of the information he will be expected to learn in subsequent sections of the course.

The problem census involves a community resource person to help clarify and further detail issues in terms of the specific local area. The community resource person can also provide a liaison with the community, coordinate outside speakers, and identify community members who might provide students with information and advice on particular issues. For pilot purposes, Leagues of Women Voters located in pilot school areas have selected one of their number to function in this capacity, and pilot teachers have been encouraged to utilize this service.

Following the problem census, the students deal with the notion of political tactics, a knowledge of which will be useful in designing their strategies.

III. The Structure and Function of American Political Institutions (State and Local).

This section is approximately six weeks in length and has as its core a series of case studies contained in political science literature on state and local government. The readings have been adapted for use by secondary school students.

Section III begins with the video tape, "Man in the Street" which is designed to spark interest among the students concerning the notion of political power. The tape consists of a series of interviews conducted with people selected at random as they shopped etc.; each person interviewed was asked how much power he or she has in influencing political decisions. Another video taped interview with Richardson Dilworth relates the content of this section to political effectiveness.

Each of the three major case studies contains information about a particular level of government. Each is introduced with a slide-tape presentation. The case study, "York Gets a New Charter" is used to relate the importance of different types of local government structure to government performance.[4] The York study also relates to the Home Rule question currently facing most Pennsylvania local governments. "The Party Chairman and the County Superintendent" study focuses on the issue of political patronage, an issue which cuts across all governmental levels; it is used as the point of departure in studying county government.[5] An examination of the role played by interest groups and the expansion of political conflict

at the state level is the focus of the third case study, "Pressure Politics in Pennsylvania" which is used in studying state government.[6]

The state legislature is given specific attention before dealing with state government generally. The formal steps in the creation of law are considered along with behind-the-scenes maneuvers.

Throughout Section III the students will have worked on problems contained in a consumable workbook that accompanies the section. The problems require the students to find information and apply it to a plausible, practical problem. The source material for the workbook includes the case studies and other readings in the Student Resource Book, pamphlets from the League of Women Voters and state government agencies, and the League book, Key to the Keystone State (to be published in September, 1972).

Two films are also used in this section, the first is to be chosen from three produced by the Department of Community Affairs; the choice depends upon the character (urban, rural, suburban) of the local pilot community. The second film is a commercially produced film on state government.

To relate the knowledge learned in the activities noted above to the strategy assignment from Section II, the students are to meet once each week in small groups with the teacher and/or community resource person. The teacher and resource person will also critically examine the students' progress, raise questions which prod them to examine alternative tactics and to consider the ramifications of each, and suggest other sources of information.

IV. How Political Leaders Are Chosen: Elections and Voting.

This section deals with elections and voting from two perspectives. First, the emphasis is on the person as voter. Short lectures, discussions, and the more experiential teaching technique of role playing, are used here in an effort to provide the student with an increased sense of value for his right to vote as well as enough knowledge to successfully register to vote. The students examine the expansion of the franchise historically, conduct mock registration exercises with sample registration materials, and, finally, those students who desire to do so, register to vote.

The second emphasis of the section is on the person as candidate. Distinctions are drawn showing the differences in candidacy at the local, state, and national levels, and how the variables of party, money, and popularity operate at each level.

Finally, attention is given to two aspects of modern political campaigns: the media and public opinion polls. The film, Campaign American Style is used in the study of the influence of media on elections.

V. Selected Characterisitcs Influencing American Political Attitudes and Behavior.

Here the students examine four basic characteristics of American social structure which influence political attitudes and behavior: sex, race, ethnicity, and social class. The section focuses on the way in which a person's status in the society influences the degree to which he feels politically effective and how differences among social groups often result in new and different types of political activity.

The section begins with another look at the video tape, "Man in the Street" which is now analyzed in depth. The tape provides the basis for an hypothesis formation exercise in which the students are asked to formulate relationships between each of the pertinent variables (sex, race, ethnicity, social class) and political power.

Following a discussion of political socialization, the students then work in one of four groups to prepare a presentation for the class on one of the following topics: Black Politics, Women in the Political World, Social Class and Political Behavior, and Ethnic Politics.

Section V is concluded with a viewing and discussion of the video tape, "Black Political Organizing in Philadelphia." This is a taped interview conducted with State Representative Hardy Williams and his administrative assistant Joanne Doddy.

VI. Evaluating Political Strategies

The final section of the course involves the students in a flow-charting activity; the students are to construct a flow-chart of their particular strategy and use this as a framework for the presentation of their strategies.

In-Service Workshop

All pilot teachers participated in an intensive two-week workshop held in Lower Merion in August. The workshop program was developed using information collected from each pilot teacher by a questionnaire

distributed in June. The purposes of the workshop were to acquaint the teachers with all course materials, to deal with teaching techniques included in the course, and to deal as well with the political knowledge that is the course substance.

Dissemination

Dissemination activities have been conducted throughout the project partly in the hope of avoiding duplication of our efforts by local school districts. Brochures were printed along with flyers and a course description. A newsletter is issued periodically, and the project has received attention in the press and by local radio and television stations. Articles such as this have been prepared for other publications, and a presentation will be made at the National Council for the Social Studies Convention to be held in Boston in November, 1972. A slide-tape presentation is also being prepared for use by the staff and the League of Women Voters in addressing interested parent, professional, and civic groups. Finally, two dissemination conferences are scheduled. The first will be conducted at Bloomsburg State College on October 19-20 and a second is being scheduled at the Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit for November.

Funding and Staff

Project 18 is financially supported with funds made available by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Title III) of 1965. The project was funded on December 13, 1971. In order to accomplish our goals by September, 1972, it was necessary to bring together a staff representing

different kinds of expertise and at the same time one composed of compatible members. We were extremely fortunate in this regard. Mike Wallace, an experienced teacher completing his doctoral studies in social studies education at Temple University, in addition to the Project Director, provided an experienced teacher perspective. Two political scientists added a substantive dimension; John Schaetzl, a PhD candidate and teaching assistant at the University of Pennsylvania and Elaine Ciulla, a Bryn Mawr graduate--both have practical campaign experience. Bob Field, an experienced social studies teacher and graduate student in communications media at UCLA joined the project in mid-June. Finally, Sally Johnson added her secretarial and administrative skills to round out the staff. Any success the project has will in large measure be attributed to the staff associates who labored so well as a team. They attacked their assignments with a missionary zeal and very rapidly internalized the goals established for the project. The ability and drive of the staff can perhaps best me mea s ured in the quality and quantity of materials produced between late spring and mid-July, 1972 when the material was sent to the printer: three books (Teacher's Manual, Teacher Resource Book, Student Resource Book), a student workbook, a pamphlet file of student materials for each pilot classroom, approximately ninety viewing minutes of video taped programming, and a series of slide tape presentations. No mean feat by anyone's standards, especially considering that only two of the staff associates were paid on a full time basis and this only at the close of the academic year.

Evaluation

Dr. Peter Martorella of Temple University is serving as the project's outside evaluator. Both formative and summative evaluative data has been and will be gathered from interviews, on-site visits, and questionnaires.

Conclusion

Project 18 is clear in purpose; it is at once substantial in content and practical. Its organization and methodology capitalize on curriculum development and social studies research generated in the last decade. The course attempts to address those grievances often voiced by students of their social studies courses and the rather general condemnation of traditional civics courses expressed by scholars. It is, in short, an attempt to combine good political science with good pedagogy.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The participating high schools are: Alternative School West, Archbishop Carroll, Cheltenham, Harriton (Lower Merion), Lower Merion, Lower Moreland, Methacton, New Castle, South Philadelphia, Langley (Pittsburgh), Port Allegany, Radnor, Southern Fulton, Susquehanna Township, and Upper Darby.

[2] "Section" is part of the High School Geography Project's, Geography in an Urban Age now published by the Macmillan Company.

[3] See Charlotte Epstein, Affective Subjects in the Classroom: Exploring Race, Sex, and Drugs. Scranton, Pa.: Intext Educational Publishers, 1972, pp. 4-20.

[4] Sidney Wise, "York Gets a New Charter" in Cases in State and Local Government. Richard T. Frost (ed.) © 1961. By permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

[5] Frank J. Sorauf, "The Party Chairman and the County Superintendent" in Cases in State and Local Government. Richard T. Frost (ed.) © 1961. By permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

6 Andrew Hacker, "Pressure Politics in Pennsylvania" in The Uses of Power: 7 Cases in American Politics. Alan Wostin (ed.), c 1962. Reprinted by permission of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.